United Nations S/2015/190

Security Council

Distr.: General
18 March 2015

Original: English

Letter dated 17 March 2015 from the Permanent Representative of Lithuania to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

I have the honour to transmit to you a letter dated 17 March 2015 from the representative of the National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces (see annex).

I would be grateful if you would have the present letter and its annex circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Raimonda **Murmokaitė**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

15-04168 (E) 180315

Please recycle

Annex to the letter dated 17 March 2015 from the Permanent Representative of Lithuania to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

On behalf of the National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces, it is with grave alarm that I draw your attention to a deadly chemical weapons attack perpetrated by Syrian regime aerial forces in the Province of Idlib, and the urgent need for decisive Security Council action to stop the Syrian regime's indiscriminate use of aerial power against civilians throughout Syria.

On Monday, 16 March 2015, Syrian regime forces dropped barrel bombs containing chlorine gas on the villages of Sarmin and Kminas in Idlib Province, south-west of the city of Aleppo. Kminas was hit at 8.30 p.m. and Sarmin was hit at 10.30 p.m. The chemical weapons attacks in Sarmin resulted in at least six civilian deaths, including those of three children, as well as their mother, father and grandmother. More than 70 other people reported suffering from choking symptoms, including seven members of the White Helmets civil defence team, who responded to the attacks. Medics and witnesses present at the site, as well as video footage taken of this illegal chemical weapons attack, offer clear evidence that the victims died of asphyxiation resulting from a toxic gas substance. Just hours after the attacks in Sarmin, Syrian regime forces launched scud missile attacks in Kafr Takharim, resulting in seven deaths.

The attacks in Idlib came just 10 days after the Security Council adopted resolution 2209 (2015), in which it noted that the use of toxic chemicals as a weapon would constitute a violation of resolution 2118 (2013) and decided, in the event of future non-compliance with resolution 2118 (2013), to impose measures under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations.

The evidence is clear: the Syrian regime has not complied with Security Council resolution 2118 (2013). It has repeatedly and systematically violated international humanitarian and international human rights law, including the Protocol for the Prohibition of the Use in War of Asphyxiating, Poisonous or Other Gases, and of Bacteriological Methods of Warfare, to which Syria acceded on 22 November 1968, as well as Council resolutions 2118 (2013), 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014) and 2209 (2015).

It is time that these resolutions be enforced. The Security Council has the legal and moral authority needed to end the suffering in Syria and to stop the regime from bombing innocent civilians. By enforcing its resolutions and imposing measures under Chapter VII — as it has decided to do in two separate resolutions on the use of chemical weapons — it will send a strong signal to the Assad regime that it cannot act with impunity. There are consequences.

It is clear that a no-fly zone — to ensure safe zones on the ground — would also be an appropriate and proportionate step for the Security Council to take. Such action would protect civilians from Assad's aerial attacks, allow for secure access to humanitarian aid, enable refugees to return to Syria and create the conditions needed to effectively fight extremists such as ISIL. The Council has the legal authority and responsibility to take such action. But given the propensity of two of its members recklessly and repeatedly to wield their vetoes in support of the Syrian regime, we must look outside the Council for help. It is incumbent upon individual Member States to take the steps needed to protect the Syrian people — steps that

they are legally entitled to take — and to establish a no-fly zone over part of Syria. Failure to do so will prolong the suffering and loss of innocent Syrian lives, and will allow the direct security threat to the region and the world to become ever more imminent.

(*Signed*) Najib **Ghadbian**
Special Representative to the United Nations
National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces